

# *Cottage Garden Design*

creating a water-wise perennial garden



... a few good things to know

by

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## Cottage Garden Design – doing it water-wise, yes you can.

The term “Cottage Garden” can mean many things. When I use it, I’m referring to a garden that runs the gamut, from a riotous mix of perennials, annuals and vegetables to a more refined collection of flowering plants contained within a clipped hedge. From the borders at Sissingherst to what I call the Grandma Garden, it can be formal or informal in its layout. It is a look that is nostalgic and romantic. This is a garden where one ‘putters’, where one can explore, discover and delight the senses.

That ‘definition’ is a pretty broad stroke, but I think the common thread is this: these gardens are labors of love, they grow and evolve. They become a reflection of the one who tends them. They are individualistic; highly personal. They require enthusiasm and an on-going involvement on the part of the caretaker. And although there is a level of commitment required, you do not have to be a slave to the garden’s upkeep either. I am one of the world’s laziest gardeners, always looking for that winning formula: little output for big returns. My talent lies in the fact that I am pragmatic; I do what works and after 26 years of creating gardens I have a bag full of tricks that I would like to pass on to you. This workshop presents some of the things I have learned over time that build in success. So, although these gardens are not low maintenance, they are not difficult either. I am convinced anyone can do it.

The water-wise part of this equation is in the plant selection and the method of irrigation, which is drip. I will get into more detail about both a little further on. But first things first, I’ll start with soil.

### #1 Gorgeous Soil:

❑ **Bring it in:** The beauty, success and pleasure that any garden can generate is in direct proportion to the quality and workability of the soil. Like my grandma used to say about her own garden soil: “a broomstick would grow in it”. If you had a budget of \$100 for your garden I would tell you to spend \$98 on good soil and buy some flower seeds with the change. Great gardens need great soil. I recommend buying the beautiful stuff in bulk. Expect to spend around \$30 for a cubic yard. If you love gardens this will be an investment you will never regret. One cubic yard will give you 27 sq ft at a depth of 12 inches. The product you want is a *complete* soil mix; often referred to as planter mix or landscape mix – this is not to be confused with compost. Compost is a valuable ingredient in a good garden soil, but it is not complete and will not support healthy plant growth by itself alone. A note: some landscape mixes can be very dry and should be re-hydrated - water them in thoroughly a couple of times before you plant. If not, the dry soil will wick away moisture from the plants you are trying to water.

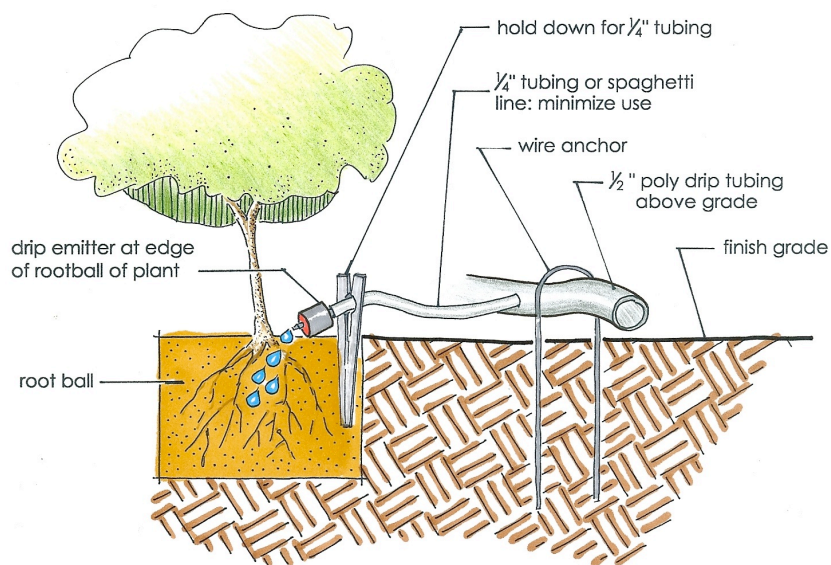
❑ **Take what you have and make it better:** You can also improve the native soil by adding generous amounts of compost. Compost is any organic humus - decomposed vegetation - bark, leaves, grass clippings, kitchen scraps (no meat please...). Manures - cow, horse, chicken or sheep - are great but they must be well composted; this means they have “cooked” as part of the compost pile, reaching temperatures that kill weed seeds - if not, you may wind up with a great crop of whatever that animal had for lunch. These products - if they are straight from the barnyard - need to be leached to remove the salinity, in particular horse and cow manures. Buying brand name bagged goods is a pretty sure bet, or composting your own, just make sure it is weed free.

❑ **Improve drainage by raising the bed:** I think a depth of 12 inches is the minimum for most perennials, and 14 to 18 inches is even better. You can use railroad ties, broken concrete, fancy masonry walls, or simply lay mounds of improved soil on top of the ground. It is a good idea to create a transition layer, meaning you incorporate a couple of inches of improved soil in with the native soil by roto-tilling or hand digging, then add the improved soil on top of that.

## #2 Managing the Garden (minimize maintenance)

❑ **Irrigation:** Even if the majority of your plant selection is low in water demand, this garden still must be irrigated once in a while. At least the kind I am addressing in today's workshop. I began working with drip systems 25 years ago and use them exclusively with great success. Drip irrigation targets the application of water to a very specific area – the root zone of the plant. It is a highly efficient and water-wise system when compared to over head sprinkler systems that apply water in large amounts over a wide area. Drip irrigation is especially well suited to the mixed perennial garden. With a variety of emitters, you can deliver 10 gallons per hour to a rose, and right next to it give a Lavender only 1 gallon per hour. That is a very good thing. What you can *not* do (on the same valve) is deliver the water at different times – obviously when the valve turns on and runs it does so for the entire garden area it is assigned to – so in terms of compatibility all plants in the same irrigation zone need to tolerate the same *frequency* of irrigation – once a week, twice a week, etc. But the amount of water can be varied depending on the emitter selected for each plant. Some of the additional benefits of drip irrigation are simple installation: the tubing lays on top of the ground (no digging trenches), the system is flexible: as described, the amount of water can really be dialed in per plant, weed control is another added bonus: because the water is specifically targeted to the root zone of the plant, you wind up irrigating the plants only, not the weed seeds that blow in. After all planting is done, a 3 inch thick layer of medium grind wood mulch is applied over the entire area, thereby covering the tubing on the ground, conserving moisture in the soil, and minimizing weed growth further. Check out your local irrigation supplier for a closer look. Stick with professional suppliers where the counter help typically is well versed on the subject and the products are 'contractor' quality.

❑ **Weed Control:** Although a good drip system really helps, weeds can also be stopped before they start with the application of pre-emergence products. These are products that do not affect growing plant tissue, but prevent the germination process of seeds. And if a seed can not germinate the seed won't grow. Simple. This is true for any seed, so if you want to sow seeds directly into the garden do not use these products. But if you have a tendency to let garden chores get past you (that would be me) go ahead, use a pre-emergent, and start your seeds in a sunny window, transplanting them once they are up.





### #3 Basic Design Principles:

A few things to consider in the composition and design of a Cottage or Perennial gardens:

Color, Texture & Form.

❑ **Color:** Perennial gardens, by their nature, are made up of many different types of plants. How do we wind up with a lovely garden and not a chaotic assortment of plants? The big answer is Color. This is one of the best tools we have in our bag of tricks. Color can be the common thread that creates order and harmony in an otherwise diverse collection of plants. Here are a few 'recipes for success'. Yes, there are other combinations; color theory is a big subject, but I guarantee that if you choose one of these palettes and stick to it you will have great results.

❑ **Monochromatic schemes:** One color – simple. Classic, white gardens are elegant and timeless. You can expand on this and add another color – deep red and white in a formal garden is gorgeous.

❑ **Pastel Palette:** These colors tend to be in the cool range – the color of the sky, water, ice. The result is calming. Blue, Purple (all shades from lightest lavender to deep purple), Pink, and White. There is an absence of orange, red and yellow influence (warm colors).

❑ **Hot Colors:** These colors are warm, the color of the sun and fire, they have a lot of energy. The palette I like is: Yellow, Orange, Red, Purple, Blue, and White.

❑ **Complementary Colors:** These are colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel, they are: Blue & Orange, Yellow & Purple, Green & Red. I love the look of this combination: Blue, Orange, Yellow & Purple. And always add white to this mix.

❑ **White:** A word about white – use it – plenty of it, especially if you want a colorful garden. The reason: white clarifies and intensifies the colors next to it. A lack of white in an otherwise colorful garden will result in a dull effect – add white here and there for 'sparkle'.

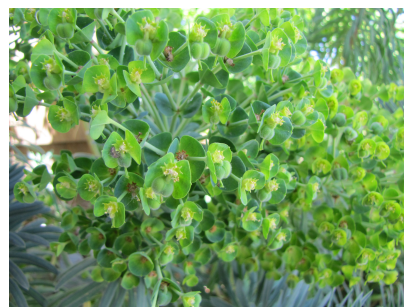
❑ **Texture – Foliage is important:** Diversity of leaf size has an effect on the garden. A garden made up entirely of plants with similar leaf size and shape is not going to be as striking as one with a variety of leaf size and texture. Grasses provide one kind of texture, large leafed plants such as Acanthus another. And don't forget foliage has color as well – from chartreuse green of Euphorbia's to the soft gray of Artemisia Powis Castle.



*Acanthus mollis*



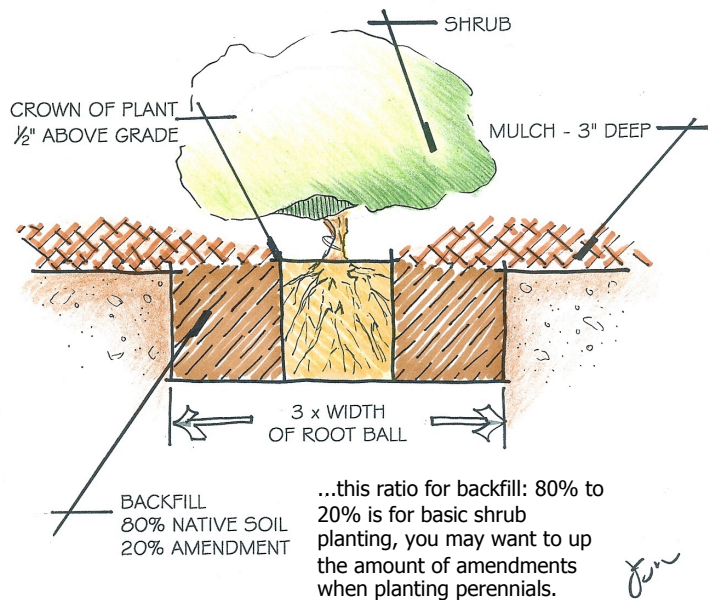
*Artemisia Powis Castle*



*Euphorbia wulfenii*

❑ **Plant Forms:** The composition of the garden takes into account plant forms, the shape of things. Some plants are full and round, some linear and spikey, others are light and airy, while some carry a lot of density. Keep this in mind and try for a variety of form. Also think about how a plant "plays" or translates as part of the garden. By this I mean that some plants are best viewed up close, or by themselves, they may not be bold enough, or strong enough to contribute as part of the over-all composition. Something small and finely detailed such as an interesting sedum may be better off showcased by itself in a wonderful pot near the garden rather than getting lost *in* the garden.



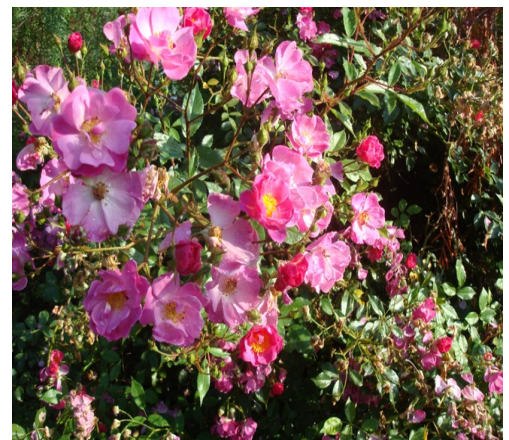


**Proper planting:** Dig a hole that is 3 times the width of the root ball and equally as deep – this ensures that the plant will not sink and cover the crown (the area of the plant where the main branch or trunk comes out of the soil). If poor drainage is a concern, go ahead and dig the hole a bit deeper to improve the soil quality, but be mindful of the plant sinking below grade, and plant a little bit high. Planting too deep is a common mistake that accounts for plants failing to thrive. Use a starter fertilizer, lower in nitrogen and higher in phosphorus and potassium, such as Start & Grow – just toss some in the planting hole. When working with perennials you may also want to up the amount of amendments, to improve soil quality. I like Kellogg's Amend for heavy clay soils. Finally after all planting is done, and the drip emitters are installed per each plant, cover the bed with a 3 inch layer of wood mulch.

#### #4 Die Hard Do-Good Perennials

All righty then – here is where my bag of tricks comes into play. Fundamentally I am a plant-nerd. A friend of mine once commented when visiting my backyard; this is not a garden it is a laboratory... true. I have calmed down a bit over the years but I still get very excited about plants and have explored and played around with them for years. I also am a Southern California Native, I love our Mediterranean climate and the plants that do well here. This list contains only plants that I have hands-on experience with, plants that I have grown in Corona. There are many plants out there worth doing - but I am putting my recommendation on these particular selections because they are easy to grow and perform well.

❑ **Roses:** This starts the list, roses being fundamental to the Cottage Garden look. People are often surprised that I use Roses in my design work, assuming that they have a high water demand. I really have not found that to be true. As a matter of fact I have a huge shrub rose about 8ft x 8ft that gets no irrigation other than seasonal rain, and it blooms in spring and is green year round. I like to use shrub roses and floribundas, I stay away from tea roses, primarily because I want the plants in my garden to give me the biggest bang for my buck; shrub and floribunda roses do that really well. They have a pretty form along with beautiful blooms, so even when they are not showing off, they are well formed shrubs with pretty foliage. My favorite these days is Julia Child, she's the color of – dare I say it? Yes - Butter... with a wonderful old-fashioned ruffled form. Another resource for great plants: David Austin Roses are an amazing collection that have been developed to combine the wonderful attributes of old fashioned species – form and fragrance – along with the best of the modern roses – disease resistance and long blooming periods. They have a yummy catalog.



This shrub rose is 8ft x 8ft and lives in my backyard on native rainfall alone...

5 A word about catalogs though, add about 25 % to the mature size specified - our So. Cal growing season never stops, and 3 ft tall in Vermont can translate 6 ft in Riverside.

❑ **Fruits & Veggies:** Historically Cottage Gardens were planted for the household and contained a mix of vegetables, herbs, fruits and flowers. Tucking a few edibles here and there adds to the over all cottage 'look' as well as providing fresh produce for the table. Here are some of my favorites:

- ❑ Apple Trees are sweet, small garden size trees, provide shelter for birds, blossoms in spring.
- ❑ Peach – especially 'Saturn' which has beautiful flowers as well a fruit
- ❑ Artichokes – Mediterranean natives, very low in water demand and a very cool looking plant – this is a perennial.
- ❑ Edible Flowers : Fun to grow and brighten up your salad. Nasturtiums, Borage (tastes like cucumber I think), Pansy and Violas, Roses. Grown for eating, obviously you do not want to spray any of these with chemicals...

❑ **Annuals & Biennials:** Plants that complete their growth cycle in a years time are called annuals. They grow, bloom and die in that cycle. Biennials are plants that have a 2 year cycle, typically growing from seed the first year, blooming the second then dying. Some of the classic Cottage flowers fall into this category. Sowing directly into the garden is one way of doing it as long as there are no pre-emergence products being used for weed control (these products stop the germination process of seeds) , you can also start seeds in a sunny window then set them out in the garden. Note that flowers grown from seed are usually more vigorous than the same species purchased in little 6 packs from the nursery. If you have never grown flowers from seed I encourage you to give it a try.

- ❑ **Hollyhocks:** Biennials or short lived perennials from the Mediterranean. Try the old fashioned single flowered varieties.
- ❑ **Cosmos:** Annuals best grown from seed, they will self sow. They can get 6 ft tall if they are happy. Color range from dark pink to white. The garden finches love the seed heads, I leave mine up well into the fall, when I finally pull them out.
- ❑ **Nigellia – Love in a Mist:** This is another fun old fashioned annual. My neighbor down the street who specializes in old roses uses Nigellia as an understory planting in her garden.
- ❑ **Cleome – Spider Flower:** Another annual grows tall 4 to 5 ft tall unusual form, classic old fashioned flower for back of the border.
- ❑ **Sunflowers:** Who doesn't love Sunflowers? Once they are done you can nail the seed head to a fence post and birds will come from all over.

❑ **Bulbs, Corms and Tubers:** I should also say rhizome... this category of garden plants is about the biggest bang for your buck that I can think of. It seems that once planted these guys work and work to produce bigger and better plants & flowers with an absolute minimum of care (in my garden that translates to about 3 hours every 4 to 5 years...) Planting a variety of bulbs will give a long period of bloom – in my garden the season starts in late February with Daffodils, then the Iris come up, then the African Bulbs like Crocosmia and Gladiolas come along as the weather heats up. Some of the best are:

- ❑ **Iris:** Amazing array of color, not fussy, low water requirement, they multiply and get better and better each year. I pretty much plant them and ignore...
- ❑ **Daffodils:** I have grown Daffs with and without irrigation – both ways have worked for me.
- ❑ **Tulips:** Like Hostas I can say yes, I have grown these in Corona – once or twice – I don't bother now, to much trouble and not enough pay back. Basically you need to chill the bulbs in the fridge to fool them into thinking they are in Cleveland rather than Southern California. I figure why bother when there are other bulbs that do so well.
- ❑ **Crocosmia:** A South African bulb, it multiplies and some people consider it invasive, I have not had that experience. The flower is an amazing deep red to orange late in spring or early summer. Love it.
- ❑ **Gladiolus:** Many from South Africa, these are an old fashioned stand by for the back of the border.
- ❑ **Watsonia:** South African again – this is a tall plant similar in bloom to a gladiolus and can reach 5 ft tall, but the flowers tend to be smaller. Easy and dependable.

❑ **Perennial Favorites:** A perennial is a plant that grows year after year. Some are very long lived, some only last a few years. Some die to the ground every year, but most on my list are year round. There are different schools of thought as to how to put together perennial beds. Many emphasize continuous bloom, meaning that there is always something in flower, which is fine, but I prefer a big spectacular show all at once rather than a weaker little bit here little bit there approach. Fortunately with plants like roses that almost always are in bloom it isn't difficult to have something blooming all spring and summer into early fall. The list that follows includes plants that I have worked with here in Corona.

❑ **Acanthus- Bear's Breech:** Excellent foliage plant. Native to the Mediterranean, this plant will go dormant and die to the ground in the heat of summer if not given supplemental water. It comes back when the weather cools and the rains start. Once it establishes it will be very difficult to eradicate, but I do not find it invasive, probably because it is on a drip system.

❑ **Achillea – Yarrow:** Great plants. My favorite is the variety 'Moonshine'. Some of the green fern leaved types I have found to be invasive. Not necessarily a bad thing, but be aware. The gray foliated types tend to stay put a bit better.

❑ **Agapanthus – Lily of the Nile:** We take this one for granted, in England they work very hard to have success with this plant. There are some varieties that have dark navy blue flowers – some of these are deciduous so do a bit of homework before you purchase. All put on a great show in summer, easy.

❑ **Alstroemeria:** South American natives, relatively easy to grow, produce masses of bloom – good long lasting cut flowers with a wide color range – everything but blue I believe.

❑ **Anigozanthos – Kangaroo Paw:** Dramatic strap leaf perennials from Australia, puts up a flower stalk 5 to 6ft tall. Typical color range red and yellow. Even though the plant is tall it is airy and open and can be used in the middle of the border. The flowers are very long lasting. There are dwarf varieties also though I have not grown them.

❑ **Arctotis:** South African native in brilliant colors hot pink and neon orange, the plant is low growing and spreads. Will need some dead-heading to keep it blooming. Loves the heat. Easy.

❑ **Artemisia 'Powis Castle':** A foliage plant, lacy gray leaves cover the plant. It also grows like a house on fire so give it plenty of room to spread – at least 4ft each direction – late fall I cut this plant back hard, in spring it sprouts again. There are flowers but they are small and inconsequential. This plant pairs well with most anything, but especially pinks and blues.

❑ **Begonia Richmondensis:** Easy tough plant, flowers almost all year, can take the sun but is probably best in with some afternoon shade.

❑ **Bidens:** Native to Mexico, southern U.S. This is an easy low growing perennial that works well cascading over a wall. It is a bright clear yellow and a prolific bloomer.

❑ **Bulbine:** Small succulent perennial South African native. This plant puts up little yellow flowers, similar in shape to aloes or red hot poker plants.

❑ **Calandrinia:** I love this plant. I believe its origin is Chile. It has succulent foliage at its base and puts up deep pink poppy-like blooms that seem to float in the air on wiry stems.

❑ **Centranthus:** The common name on this one is Jupiter's Beard, although I only read that – I have never heard anyone refer to it by that name. Native to the Mediterranean, it comes in red (dark pink really) and white. It is definitely invasive, but very pretty and a good filler, so your call. I pull where I don't want it and leave it to grow where I do want it.

❑ **Cistus – Rock Rose:** A large genus of flowering shrubs from the Mediterranean. Most all have large poppy like flowers in a range of pink to white. Some species are tall to 5 ft, others have prostrate growth as low as 8 inches. They all have a very low water requirement. Some (C. salviifolius) will not tolerate any summer water. 'Sunset' is one of my favorite varieties for the perennial garden, also C. purpurea, C. landanifer. Frankly I don't think the C. skanbergii is worth doing in this application – the plant is kind of coarse and the flowers are so-so.



❑ **Convolvulus sabatius – Ground Morning Glory:** This is a great low growing perennial. Although many Morning Glory plants can be invasive, this species is not. I have one plant that has been in the corner of my garden for years and it spreads about 6 ft each direction and spills over the garden wall – it is covered with masses of pale blue flowers all spring and summer.

❑ **Dianella – Flax Lilly:** Australian Natives, this is an interesting group of plants that provide primary interest through their strap leaf foliage, the flowers are pretty although not particularly showy – it is the metallic blue berries that I find most attractive. They benefit from some afternoon shade in our climate.

❑ **Dianthus – Cottage Pinks:** An old fashioned Cottage Garden classic, these are little carnations. The foliage is usually a pretty gray-blue. They do best at the front of the border because of their small size. Many have a wonderful rich spicy scent of cloves.

❑ **Dietes – Fortnight Lily:** Common landscape plant that delivers without a fuss, another that we take for granted because it is so common. It is related to Iris has long strap leaves and provides a nice vertical accent in the garden. The blooms are white with purple and yellow accents. This plant is also a victim of poor commercial maintenance practices – it is often cut to the ground because that is the easy thing to do. What you *should do* in your garden is lift and divide it in the fall, if and when the plant loses its vigor and bloom. I would expect to do this about every 3 to 4 years. Easy dependable, this will also tolerate some shade.

❑ **Echinacea – Cone Flower:** Classic prairie flower, grows 2 to 3 ft tall. Pink-purple blooms all summer. The cone in the center is orange-ish. Which is a really interesting color combination. Very pretty.

❑ **Erigeron karvinskianus – Santa Barbara Daisy:** This plant is covered with little daisy like blooms all spring and summer. It is tough and self-sows like mad. But it is easy to pull out where you do not want it. I appreciate plants that find new homes for their off spring, as long as they are generally well behaved. This plant will get 3ft across and about 2 ft tall. Cut it back hard at the end of the summer, otherwise it will just get all tangled up and funky looking. Super easy. I have them everywhere...

❑ **Erysimum – Bowles Mauve:** A well behaved perennial with gray-ish foliage and purple flowers borne above on slender stalks. Has a nice tidy rounded habit.

❑ **Euphorbia characias:** Euphorbia is a huge genus of plants that range from our Christmas Poinsettias to Cactus like plants. This particular Euphorbia has a wonderful lime-chartreuse green bloom on tall stalks that have gray leaves. A very cool looking plant. It also re-seeds which I consider a bonus – I pull it out where I don't want it. Like all members of the Euphorbia family this plant has a milky sap that can be irritating to some people's skin.

❑ **Gaillardia – Blanket Flower:** Heat loving, easy to grow, this perennial is native to the western U. S. There are a number of hybrids out there these days but most are in the color range of Orange-Red to Yellow.

❑ **Gaura lindheimeri:** Texas native, I love this plant. It looks like baby's breath on steroids... About 4 ft tall but open and airy, long wiry stems come up from the base foliage and are covered with white flowers about an inch across. There is a pink variety - but it doesn't seem to have the pretty open habit of the natural species. Gaura will re-seed freely, but again I consider this a plus and just pull out what I do not want. In the cold winter months the plant does not much of anything, and the leaves get a funny red spot on them – nothing wrong with the plant it is just what it does... very dependable, a great container specimen with a very low water requirement.

❑ **Geraniums:** These are true geraniums, not our more common pelargoniums (which includes scented geraniums, zonal geraniums and ivy geraniums). There are many different species. The ones sold here tend to be "Johnson's Blue", and once established they are really pretty tough and do not require that much water. Probably because of their rhizomatous root systems. They will do best with some shade in the afternoon. I grow them in pots and they do well.

❑ **Heuchera – Coral Bells:** Pretty flowers native to California, I like the Santa Ana Hybrids the best. "Wendy" is a good one. They prefer some shade in the afternoon. The plant has pretty leaves and the flowers are borne above the foliage on thin wiry stems. The effect is soft, kind of airy. The color range in blooms is from palest pink to dark red. There are a lot of hybrids on the market. I have found that the purple leaved varieties are very short lived. They are pretty though, so go ahead and grow them, but don't expect them to be around after the first year, and then if they are, that is just a nice bonus.

❑ **Kniphofia – Red Hot Poker:** African native. A strap leaf perennial that sends up tall stems topped with flowers that are red and yellow – hence the name red hot poker. A dependable garden plant, nice dramatic effect, and low in water demand.

❑ **Lavandula – Lavender:** Another garden classic and native to the Mediterranean. There many species out there to try. My all time favorite is the *L. dentata* – French Lavender. This plant is just about bullet proof, blooms constantly, has a very low water requirement, needs no attention, and is highly fragrant: what's not to like? It gets to be about 3 ft across by 2 to 3 ft tall. Goodwin Creek Grey is a hybrid that has great performance and fragrance. Some of the other species – the English Lavenders - are very pretty as well, (maybe prettier) but have a shorter bloom period. I think they are all worth trying. Be aware that lavender is very attractive to bees.

❑ **Limonium perezii – Sea Lavender:** Common perennial – short lived (about 4 years) well worth planting. Easy. Pretty blooms are lavender-blue and paper like, they last a long time.

❑ **Linaria :** Linaria is a group of plants that includes perennials and annuals. The annual varieties are really fun and easy to grow. The one perennial species I like is *L. prupurea Cannon J Went*. It is an airy delicate plant with pale pink flowers, origin Southern Europe.

❑ **Lobelia laxiflora:** This is a perennial lobelia not to be confused with the little blue flower commonly sold in 6 packs at the nursery. Lobelia laxiflora is a drought tolerant perennial about 3 ft wide x 2 ft tall with orange tubular flowers that are attractive to humming birds. It is native to Mexico and Arizona and requires little care.

❑ **Lychnis coronaria – Mullen Pink:** Native to Southern Europe. Perennial. Makes a dramatic statement, the foliage is silver gray, the flowers are intense magenta-pink. Self sows freely in the garden. I find it dies back in the winter and comes back in the spring. I don't consider it invasive - I pull it out where I don't want it, and leave it where I do.

❑ **Nemesia:** A great group of annual and perennial plants native to Africa. Some of the annual nemesias are gorgeous, the Tapestry series is fun. Try some in a big pot, they will spill over the sides in big clouds of color from orange to pink to red and yellow. The best perennial nemesia on the market is one called Blue Bird. It has been around for a good long while and is a dependable little plant growing about 1 ft tall spreading to 2 or 3 ft in time. It has lavender blue flowers that cover the plant in spring and summer. For the front of the border.

❑ **Nepeta – Cat Mint:** Perennial low growing with pale blue flowers. Classic Cottage plant easy to grow.

❑ **Pelargonium:** This is a large group of perennials that we commonly refer to as geraniums. You could make a garden out of nothing but this genus. The scented geraniums are especially fun, with small flowers and scented foliage, there are many types out there to collect, all easy to grow. Also what we call zonal geraniums are pelargoniums. Some of the foliage in this category are really spectacular with 3 and 4 colors. They are all easy to grow and fun. And the good old common orange-red geraniums are worth doing too. Great color and so little effort involved on the part of the gardener – my kind of plant!

❑ **Penstemon – Beard Tongue:** Another one of those common names that I have only read, everyone I know refers to these plants as Penstemon... A huge group of plants, many that are native to the western states. There are the common garden variety: *P.* hybrids these include named selections such as: Apple Blossom (pale pink) Midnight (dk purple) Garnet (wine red). Then there are the natives, *P. heterophyllus* 'Margareta Bop', and *P. spectabilis* which grows wild in vacant lots in Rancho Cucamonga. Most species require very little in the way of water, all have pretty showy flowers. Worth looking into...

❑ **Perovskia – Russian Sage:** A large perennial about 4ft x 4ft . It has an open quality even though it is a good sized plant. Many upright stems with gray foliage, the blooms are blue, very pretty and requires very little water.

❑ **Phlomis – Jerusalem Sage:** Large perennial shrub that has whorls of yellow or pink flowers. Interesting form, the foliage is an olive green. Native to Mediterranean.

❑ **Rudbeckia – Lazy Susan:** Classic prairie flower. Sunny yellow daisy like flowers with a big brown ‘eye’ in the center. This is a short lived perennial but can self sow.

❑ **Salvia – Ornamental Sage:** A huge group of plants with many natives and near native species, there are a lot to choose from that are low in their water requirement. All are highly ornamental. The color range runs the gamut from white, red, pink, blue, purple. All are attractive to hummingbirds. Too many to mention all, but some of my favorites are:

❑ *S. leucantha* - Midnight is a good variety solid purple, Santa Barbara is supposed to be a more compact variety.

❑ *S. clevelandii* – native to our foothills, great garden plant, adaptable, blue flowers.

❑ *S. chamaedryoides* - low growing plant for the front of the border, gray foliage, cobalt blue flowers. Cut back dead wood every year.

❑ *S. gregii* – this is a group of semi-woody plants that grow about 3 ft tall. Furman’s Red is the clearest deepest red I have seen on any plant other than roses. A great, hard to find color.

❑ **Sisyrinchium – Blue Eyed Grass:** Native grass-like plant that has little blue flowers in spring, great front of the border plant.

❑ **Verbena:** I love verbena – great color and performs well, most love the heat. My favorite species for the garden are: *V. rigida*, native to Brazil & Argentina, it grows by underground stems, great deep purple color in spring and summer. This plant stays pretty low – under 18 inches. *V. bonariensis* is a fun plant that grows to 5 ft tall. It is very open, sending up a lot of wiry stems that have lilac-purple colored flowers at the very top. It tends to re-seed, but here again I think this is a bonus. There are also low growing ground covers out there; “homestead” is a good purple. Low water demand.



**Invasive plants:** There are some plants that self sow or become extremely enthusiastic and I have been saying I just leave what I want and pull out what I don’t want, no big deal, its all a good-natured give and take... but then there are what I call “Jezebel” plants. These are plants that lull you into wanting them simply because they are beautiful, once you get them home they turn your garden life into a living hell and you rue the day you fell in love and said “I have to have that one...” This is a picture of the Perennial Blue Morning Glory Vine *Ipomoea acuminata* – as in accumulate – perpetually endlessly accumulate: the species name has since been changed to *indica* – personally I think they should have changed it to “get your head examined sucker” or what ever the Latin for that is. Anyway... We are still fighting it, a 15 year battle. Do not go there.

Another plant that fits this category is Mexican Evening Primrose (*Oenothera berlandieri*) this pink flowering plant can work as part of a ground cover tapestry but NOT in a mixed border where it will overtake everyone else – it does not share its space at all... and is difficult to control.